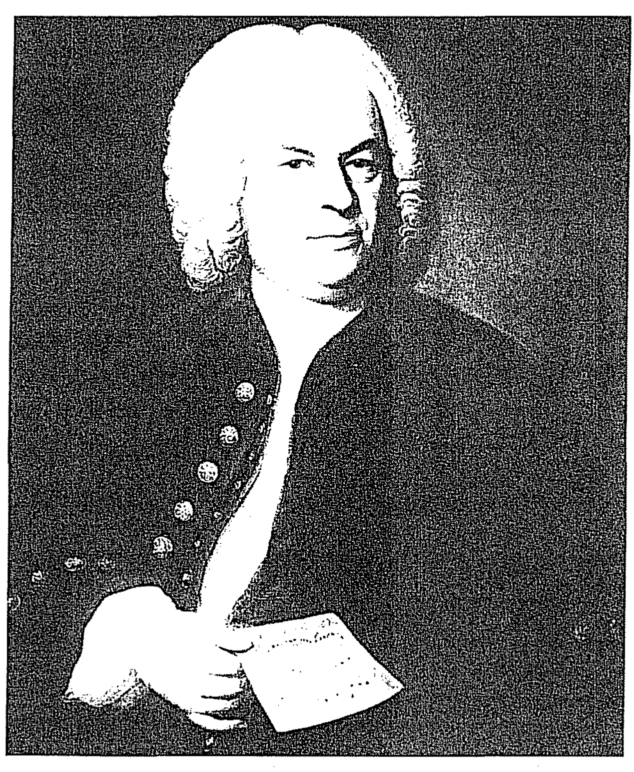
Mourning into Dancing: Dance Rhythms in J. S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*



by Helen Hoekema Van Wyck

J. S. Bach, Symbolism, and Baroque Musical Rhetoric

Many types of musical symbolism have been associated with or attributed to Johann Sebastian Bach. Few aspects of Bach's music have spurred more vehement expression of divergent opinion than the issue of what type of musical symbols the composer incorporated into his works, and with what intent. It seems obvious that the convention of pictorial symbolism—the representation of a word or idea of the text by means of a musical figure, such as the use of high pitches for the word heaven, rapid sixteenth notes for running—does occur in Bach's music, as it does in the compositions of most, if not all, baroque composers.

Attention has also been given to the topic of number symbolism in Bach's music. A close connection between music and numbers exists in the baroque era; a fascination with numbers and intellectual games involving numbers was evidently characteristic of Bach and of other baroque scholars. One aspect of this mathematical-musical connection is the so-called number alphabet or *gematria*. While recently discounted, in this system letters of the alphabet are associated with numbers (A=1, B=2, etc.). By this reckoning, Bach's number was fourteen: B (2) + A (1) + C (3) + H (8). Geiringer postulates that Bach hesitated for two years about joining a learned society in Leipzig until 1747, when he could join as the fourteenth member.[1] Helmuth Rilling points out the significance of the fourteen notes in the bass line of the lush two-measure chorus "Wahrlich, dieser ist Gottes Sohn" ["Truly this was the Son of God"] from the *St. Matthew Passion;* he describes this as Bach's personal signature of the glowing recognition made by the centurion following Christ's crucifixion.[2] Debate exists among Bach scholars about the extent to which Bach used this type of number alphabet and the composer's motivation for doing so. Evidence exists for more obvious number symbolism in Bach's music, such as the use of certain numbers in connection with biblical references or concepts of the trinity (the number 3), the law or commandments (the number 10), or the disciples (the number 12).

Other types of symbolism that can be found in the music of Bach include formal or melodic representations of textual ideas, i.e., the use of a canon in a passage that describes following Christ. The cross motives attributed to Bach's music appear in several guises: one sort is a melodic *chiasmus* in which the drawing of lines to connect the notes of a melodic figure produces the shape of the cross. Other varieties of cross symbols found in Bach's music include the use of sharps for texts dealing with the cross (Kreuz means both sharp and cross in German), or the appearance of a cross shape in the musical score, in which linear (horizontal) orchestral parts intersect with short choral outbursts (the vertical axis).[3]

Some Bach scholars have shown a connection between keys or tonalities used by Bach and their implied theological symbolism. Eric Chafe believes that Bach purposely used key areas and key progressions to indicate deeper theological meaning, proposing that tonality is the "level of allegory that represents stages of the inner, spiritual life."[4] Vladimir Konecni also addresses the importance of contrast of tonalities as a powerful tool of arousal control in the *St. Matthew Passion.*[5] In an older study, Wilibald Gurlitt

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speaks of the drama of basic movement beyond the passion music itself brought about by the "grouping of individual passages according to key and tonal association."[6]

The subject of musical rhetoric, especially with regard to the baroque era, has attracted attention in recent years. Rhetoric in music can be described as the formal or organizational arrangements of elements in a composition, which in Christopher Hill's words "engender in an audience a sense of aesthetic satisfaction or psychological plausibility that clarifies or heightens the intended effect of a composition or performance."[7] The doctrine of the affections [*Affektenlehre*] and the closely related doctrine of figures [*Figurenlehre*], a more-or-less codified group of musical figures that carry symbolic meaning, illuminate one aspect of the baroque idea of rhetoric in music.

Bach pursued his artistic purpose by means of exploration of a rich variety of compositional genres, nearly all of which were affected by dance idioms.

While scholars of the baroque era may disagree about the nature and extent of symbolism, allegory, and rhetorical devices found in Bach's music, few would disagree that allegorical or symbolic references—particularly those with theological implications—exist in the music of Bach. Discerning which of these devices were motivated by allegorical intent and which were purely musical is a daunting task and must be undertaken with the fullest possible understanding of Bach's theological and musical perspectives, the specific composition at hand and its place in Bach's works, and the aesthetic theory of the day. Chiapusso summarizes Bach's skill in incorporating spiritual symbolism into his works this way: "In [Bach's] case the idea given by the text is translated into music by emotion disciplined by esthetics."[8] Or, according to Bukofzer:

> Like the baroque emblems which imposed non-pictorial and allegorical meanings on pictures, music too, was able to realize extra-musical meanings that, however intellectually contrived, enhanced the meaning of the music. They actually supplied the composer with the raw material (intervals and rhythms) out of which he built his composition. . . . These metaphorical procedures . . . were common property in baroque music, but assumed vital importance with Bach because he was able to make them subservient to an artistic purpose.[9]

Dance at the Time of Bach

Bach pursued his artistic purpose by means of exploration of a rich variety of compositional genres, nearly all of which were affected by dance idioms. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, French court dance influenced civilized society throughout Europe, including Germany. The aristocratic and refined dances of the court of Louis XIV found their way into German courts as German

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noblemen hired French dancing masters to "lead them on the pathway to elegance."[10] Such lessons in dancing, and also in French language, etiquette, and deportment, were considered prerequisites for civilized court behavior for middle- and upper-class class German citizens of this era. Bach was, in all likelihood, familiar with these traditions and rituals; Meredith Little and Natalie Jenne cite evidence that a number of French dancing masters working in Saxony were friends or acquaintances of Bach.[11]

Another indication of Bach's familiarity with French musical traditions is that Bach occasionally made use of French instrumental terminology or French titles for movements of his instrumental works, particularly those for keyboard. The so-called French overture, which developed in connection with French opera and ballet, appears as an opening movement in numerous Bach works, including keyboard and orchestral suites, many cantatas. Bach's frequent employment of dance styles, moreover, gives evidence of the composer's familiarity with one particularly important French musical genre of his time: the suite or *ordre* of instrumental dances. By the end of the seventeenth century, such a suite typically consisted of allemande, courante, sarabande, a light dance (minuet, bourrée, gavotte, passepied, or a polonaise) and a gigue.[12]

Dance achieved great popularity and importance in Europe in the late seventeenth century. Curt Sachs describes the influence of dance rhythms as "one of the most essential traits of the baroque," stating that "an age so solidly built on movement could hardly avoid a decisive influence on the part of the most movemental of the arts."[13] Dance forms in music, however, became increasingly independent during the baroque era—less connected to actual dancing and more associated with musical performance—and this development may help explain the incorporation of so many dance rhythms into vocal and choral works, as well as instrumental compositions of this period. Natalie Jenne mentions Bach's "diverse and often ingenious use" of dance rhythms or of stylized dance forms in instrumental suites, vocal music, sonatas, concerti, and variations.[14]

Given Bach's familiarity with dance forms and the importance of the dance in eighteenth-century society, the question of the significance of the use of dance rhythms in Bach's sacred music is a legitimate one. Authors such as Hans-Joachim Schulze have raised the issue of dance as symbol in the music of Bach: he describes the spectrum of Bach's use of dance rhythms as incorporating "individual numbers where the apparently esoteric reason for employing a dance form is a deliberate symbolic act."[15] Wilfrid Mellers discusses the operatic arias of Bach's day as "controlled by a given dance rhythm, often with allegorical intent."[16]

While specific baroque dances are often associated with specific affects, it was also characteristic of the baroque era to associate dance more often with joy than with sorrow.[17] This concept of the celebratory quality of dance has ancient roots—the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes contains this famous listing of opposites:

> For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:
> a time to be born, and a time to die. . .

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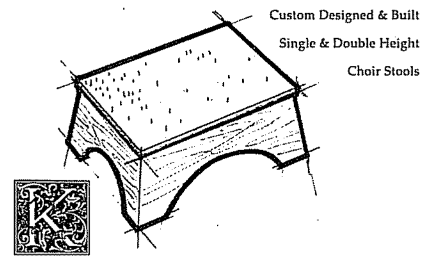

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a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance.[18]

In consideration of this association, the use of dance rhythms in Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* seems particularly significant. In choosing specific dance forms to express certain passages of the Passion story, Bach may have been referring to a deeper level of theological significance than that which appears on the surface, beyond the compellingly beautiful musical expression that is the *St. Matthew Passion.*

Dance Forms in the *St. Matthew Passion*

Bach's setting of the *St. Matthew Passion* is monumental in scope, exceeding any of the composer's previous works in length, forces required for performance, and formal and compositional variety. Christoph Wolff describes the work as a "kaleidoscopic panorama of the rich and multifaceted repertoire of forms in late baroque vocal music."[19] The text of Bach's setting of the gospel story consists of the biblical narrative (sung by the Evangelist), dramatic action from the scriptural account (expressed in the *turba* choruses and arias), commentary or reflection on the drama taken from texts by Picander (sung by soloists in ariosos or arias, or occasionally by the chorus), and meditative chorale verses written by authors such as Johann Heermann and Paul Gerhardt (sung by the chorus).[20] The diversity of text sources and of compositional styles enhances the element of contrast, which is vital to the overall structure of the *St. Matthew Passion.*

The texts of several movements refer to a relationship or dialogue between the "Daughter of Zion," sometimes represented by the first chorus, and the "Faithful," often represented by the second chorus. This juxtaposition of two allegorical moods permeates several movements of the piece and may be based on a 1711 passion libretto of B. H. Brockes.[21] This dialogue technique pervades the work's opening chorus, the chorale fantasia that concludes Part I, and the closing chorus, in addition to six arias with choral participation, sometimes called dialogue arias. These contrasts of musical performing forces are only one of a host of dualisms or contrasts found in the *St. Matthew Passion,* specifically, and in the music of Bach in general. The *Passion* is full of evidences of these juxtapositions, such as darkness versus light, bitter versus sweet, sleeping versus waking; on a deeper level, the piece deals with crucifixion and redemption, death and eternal life, confession and forgiveness. Wilfrid Mellers relates this to the sense of theological paradox in Bach's Lutheran perspective, suggesting that analogous to Luther's belief in the "sweet wounds of Christ," Bach's music is "simultaneously mystical and human, spiritual and material, sacred and profane."[22]

One of the structural elements Bach uses to depict these contrasts in the *St. Matthew Passion* is dance. The world of dance and the story of Christ's crucifixion may seem mutually exclusive, or at least

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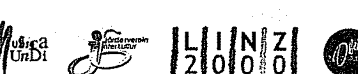

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unlikely allies. For Bach, however, little distinction was made in considering things sacred and secular, and accordingly, between instrumental music and sacred choral music. Jaroslav Pelikan discusses Bach's unified world view as one that proclaims that "the performance of any God-pleasing vocation was the service of God," and that "all beauty, including 'secular' beauty, was sacred because God was one, both Creator and Redeemer."[23] Bach's careful commitment to ideas of formal construction and symmetry, his interest in pictorial or otherwise symbolic musical gestures, and his broad experience in combining disparate stylistic elements in his compositions all contribute to the picture of a composer interested in the dance and its considerable potential for use in sacred and secular musical settings.

Bach's first biographer, Johann Nicolaus Forkel (1749–1818), describes Bach's expertise in the diversified use of rhythm, especially with regard to dance tunes, in which rhythm was the most important object. He speaks of the importance of giving to every dance tune its precise character and rhythm. Suggesting that Bach made use of dance idioms in compositions other than dance suites, Forkel continues:

> [Bach] eventually acquired such a facility in this particular that he was able to give even to his fugues, with all the intricate interweaving of their single parts, striking and characteristic rhythmic proportions in a manner as easy and uninterrupted from the beginning to the end as if they were minuets.[24]

Several examples of dance idioms can be cited in Bach's sacred vocal music; Little and Jenne have listed many of these instances in both sacred and secular cantatas of Bach. In Bach's motets, for example, which are not considered in Little and Jenne's survey, dance rhythms also appear prominently. The opening section of "Singet dem Herrn" (BWV 225) can be thought of as a polonaise; "Komm, Jesu, Komm" (BWV 229) opens with what might be called a sarabande; and "Der Geist hilft unser Schwachheit auf" (BWV 226) begins with an Italian gigue, or giga II (Little and Jenne's term). Other examples can be found in "Jesu, meine Freude" (BWV 227): movements 2, 4, and 9 can be thought of as minuets, and movement 8 resembles a siciliano or a French gigue.

The following examples cite selected movements of the *St. Matthew Passion,* all involving chorus, which appear to make use of dance rhythms. Included are a brief description of the movement in question, a suggestion as to which dance rhythm is used, a description of the dance form, and the possible symbolic or textual connections between the dance and the piece in which it appears. Movement numbers given are NBA numbers.

1. Movement 1: opening chorus, "Kommt, ihr Töchter" ["Come, Ye Daughters"]—Siciliano

A dance-like piece known as the siciliano (or siciliana) appears frequently in the instrumental music of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Little evidence exists that sheds light on its use

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or origin as an actual dance, but such pieces are used as slow movements in sonatas and suites of baroque composers such as Telemann, Handel, and J. S. Bach. Musical characteristics of the siciliano include a slow-to-moderate $\frac{6}{8}$ or $\frac{12}{8}$ meter, clear one- or two-bar phrases, and a simple melody that evokes pastoral scenes. Mattheson associated the siciliano with the *villanella* or *napolitana*, which were popular and rustic vocal songs in sixteenth-century Italy, and said it was best suited to suggest melancholy passions, while Brossard and Quantz described the siciliano as a slow gigue.[25] Typical rhythmic figures include recurring dotted patterns (♩. ♪♩), alternating quarter- and eighth-note activity (♩♪♩♪), and an iambic quality brought about by an eighth-note upbeat.

Bach opens the *St. Matthew Passion* with a massive chorus calling for large and diverse forces: double SATB chorus, double full orchestra of strings, two flutes, two oboes, continuo, and organ, and a ripieno chorus of treble voices. The movement resembles a solemn siciliano with its $\frac{12}{8}$ meter and pervasive quarter-eighth note rhythmic alteration.[26] The key of E minor, one of the principal tonal areas of the entire work, is a traditional key of lamentation.[27]

The long orchestral introduction sets the scene for an extended antiphonal dialogue between the Daughter of Zion (chorus I) and the faithful believers (Chorus II). Superimposed upon this dialogue is a treble chorus singing a *cantus firmus*, the chorale "O Lamm Gottes unschuldig" ["O innocent Lamb of God"]. The image of Christ as "Lamm" [lamb], which appears in the texts of both the chorale and the antiphonal chorus contributes to the interpretation of this movement as a siciliano, a dance movement that usually contains pastoral associations. The image of Christ as a lamb is also important to the central theme of the Passion, the sacrifice of Christ, in that it recalls Old Testament religious animal sacrifices. The siciliano character of this chorus seems to emphasize the loving and merciful nature of the innocent Jesus. The use of "O Lamm Gottes" as a *cantus firmus* is also significant in the context of Bach's theological and liturgical heritage: the chorale ends with the phrase "Erbarm dich unser O Jesu" ["Have mercy upon us, O Jesus"], which is much like the text of the Kyrie eleison that opens the traditional Latin mass, while the reference to Christ as the Lamb of God corresponds closely to that of the Agnus Dei, the final section of the mass.

2. Movement 20: tenor aria with chorus, "Ich will bei meinem Jesu wachen"["I will watch with my Jesus"]—Bourrée

The bourrée is a lively duple dance in $\frac{2}{2}$ or $\frac{4}{4}$, which originated in France in the mid-sixteenth century. Mattheson describes its character as calm and placid, exhibiting contentment and pleasantness, and as "more flowing, smooth, gliding, and connected than the gavotte."[28] The bourrée begins with an upbeat, usually a single quarter note, leading to a four-measure phrase, often with a feminine

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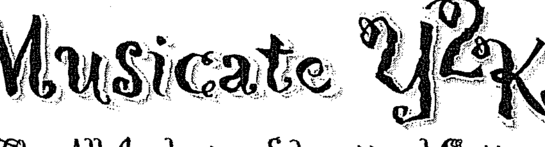

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phrase ending. This dance has earthy folk-like roots, originating as a peasant's dance; bourrées may have been danced and sung by winemakers while crushing grapes.[29] The bourrée tends toward a simple homophonic texture with vigorous and simple rhythms and clear phrase structure. Characteristic rhythmic figures include a quarter-half-quarter syncopation (♩𝅗𝅥♩), and many short-short-long (♫♩) motives. The tempo of the bourrée was probably slightly faster than that of the gavotte. In suites of dances, bourrées often appear in pairs, with the second bourrée featuring the drone bass typical of the musette.

"Ich will bei meinem Jesu wachen," a dialogue aria, follows on the scene from the passion story in which Jesus has told Peter that he will betray him. Jesus has gone to the garden of Gethsemane to pray, asking three of the disciples to wait with him while he prays. The tenor soloist, representing the believer, pledges his faithfulness in watching with Christ in the aria "Ich will bei meinem Jesu wachen," and chorale phrases are sung by chorus II between sections of the aria in lullaby fashion with the ironic text, "So schlafen unsre Sünden ein" ["so all our sins go to sleep"]. This strong juxtaposition of the images of waking and sleeping pervades the movement.

The aria for tenor, oboe obbligato, and chorus takes the form of a type of bourrée, although one in which the characteristic upbeat opening leads to beat 3, not the downbeat. One rhythmic motive that contributes to the movement's dance-like quality is the opening oboe figure, later shared by the soloist, illustrated in Figure 1. Also characteristically dance-like are the oboe part's frequent staccato upbeats, either to the full or half measure, and the eighth-note figure in which the middle two notes are slurred (♫♫). A striking contrast to these figures, which underlines the textual juxtaposition, is provided by the gently rocking eighth-note motives of the chorus passages, giving the effect of a crooning cradle song coupled with the signal or watchman's motives (rising perfect fourths) of the tenor solo.[31]

The aria's B section introduces text about the importance of redemption. Further contrasts, those of "Trauren" vs. "Freuden" [sorrow vs. joy] or "bitter" vs. "süss" [bitter vs. sweet] in the choral passages, deepen the effect of this strong image. The use of dance rhythms in this movement may refer to the crucial place Christ's suffering and death hold for the believer's redemption.

3. Movement 27b: Chorus, "Sind Blitze, sind Donner" ["Have Lightning and Thunder..."]—Gigue/Giga II

The closing movement of the standard baroque dance suite is the gigue, a quick dance featuring a fast tempo and triple groupings of notes at the pulse level. Descriptions and definitions of the gigue—

Figure 1. Movement 20, mm. 1–2[30]

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as well as its rhythmic and textural content—vary widely, partly due to the appearance of the dance in music of Italy (called giga), England (jig), and France (gigue). The dance is, in all likelihood, Irish and English in origin and dates from the sixteenth century. Qualities shared by most forms of the gigue include triple or compound meter, a fast tempo, binary form, and a lively and joyful manner. Mattheson ascribes four principal affects to the gigue: passion or zeal, pride, foolish ambition, and the volatile spirit; he generally attributes the qualities of ardent and fleeting zeal to this dance.[32]

Little and Jenne distinguish three types of gigues: the French gigue, characterized by $\frac{6}{8}$ or $\frac{12}{8}$ meter, occasional irregular phrases and imitative texture; the Italian giga I, described as having triple groupings at the lowest level ($\frac{3}{8}$, $\frac{6}{8}$, $\frac{9}{8}$ or $\frac{12}{8}$), few or widely spaced important cadences, and jagged or uneven rhythms; and the giga II, also Italian in origin, which is characterized by a triple division of the beat but a duple division at the pulse level.[33] The French gigue displays a graceful lilting motion reinforced by an abundance of dotted figures (♪. ♫), as well as frequent syncopation or hemiola. (This type of gigue is called a canarie by some scholars.[34]) Both types of Italian giga are performed at a faster tempo than the French version, and exhibit balanced four-measure phrases and homophonic texture. Upbeat notes are common but not invariably present in all these dance types. Bach wrote twenty titled gigas in the giga II category, including movements within such diverse works as instrumental suites and partitas and the "Gloria" from the *B-Minor Mass.*

Movement 27a of the *Passion,* "So ist mein Jesus nun gefangen" ["So is my Jesus now captured"], is a mournful aria for soprano and alto in which the soloists and the orchestral winds bemoan the impending apprehension of the Savior. Suddenly entering the musical drama, nearly interrupting the lament mid-phrase, is the fiery chorus 27b, "Sind Blitze, sind Donner in Wolken verschwunden?" ["Have lightning and thunder vanished in the clouds?"]. This outburst speaks for the Christian community by rising up in rage against Christ's arrest, railing at man and nature for not swallowing up the betrayer.[35] This chorus, "stupendous in its malignant vigour," seems all the more furious because of the lamenting character of the preceding movement.[36] Geiringer calls this chorus "one of the most violent and grandiose descriptions of unloosened passion produced in the Baroque era."[37]

The chorus "Sind Blitze . . . " fits the definition of a Giga II in its rhythmic and contrapuntal content; its fugal opening, steady eighth- and sixteenth-note rhythms (♪ ♬♬), and counter-rhythms between choruses confirm this analysis. In terms of emotive intent, it seems devoid of the spirit of dance, although Mattheson ascribes the emotions of fury and passion as well as a volatile spirit to the gigue, especially the Italian version.[38] Schweitzer holds that the rolling sixteenth-note figures suggest distant thunder.[39] The furious rhythmic activity by choirs and orchestras is combined with a fast tempo and hellish, complex harmonies. The agitation and ferocity of the text, especially that of "zertrümmre, verderbe, verschlinge, zerschelle" ["destroy them, ruin them, devour them, shatter them"] during mm. 121–137, are graphically depicted by the use of secondary dominant triads, diminished seventh chords, and a Neapolitan sixth chord (m. 134). Bach uses a false relation (or cross relation) to depict the "falschen Verräter" ["false betrayer"] in measure 135 (choir I soprano F♮, beat 1, followed by F♯ in choir I alto, beat 2) (Figure 2).

The surprising E-major final cadence of this ferocious chorus, coupled with the dance-like rhythmic figures of the gigue, suggest that for Bach, the ultimate outcome of this fiery battle is assured. In the gospel story, the believers and their protests are unable to keep Christ's enemies at bay, and Christ was arrested and later crucified. Bach knew and believed, however, that the victory over human betrayal, death, and hell was assured once and for all by Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross. In the light of this kind of faith it is not surprising that Bach set such a dark text in a dance-like expression.

Figure 2. Movement 27b, mm. 133–137 (chorus and continuo) Choir I: Choir II

4. Movement 30: alto aria with chorus, "Ach, nun ist mein Jesus hin" ["Ah, now is my Jesus gone"]—Minuet

A relatively late addition to the list of baroque dance forms is the minuet (also spelled menuet), which first appeared in dance suites around 1650. When included as a movement of a suite, the minuet appears between the sarabande and gigue. Like the courante, the minuet may have originated as a branle of Poitou in the early seventeenth century. The minuet is a cheerful, quick dance in $\frac{3}{4}$ or $\frac{3}{8}$ meter, although its tempo became somewhat slower overall during the eighteenth century. The word is derived from minutus, the Latin word for small or neat, and the dance was executed with small, dainty steps.

Moderate gaiety and cheerfulness are qualities of the minuet, according to Mattheson; the character of the dance is described by Rousseau as one of elegance and noble simplicity.[40] Minuets typically begin on the downbeat or occasionally on an upbeat quarter note, and frequently feature balanced four-measure phrases occurring in two-measure units in an antecedent—consequent relationship. From approximately 1700 on, minuets appear in pairs and are to be performed in ABA fashion, with the second minuet (sometimes labeled as a "trio") displaying a thinner texture and contrast of key or mode.

Bach composed twenty-eight titled minuets, many of which are pairs of dances as described above. Bach's works in this genre span a wide variety of performance media and instrumentation. Numerous vocal works feature minuets or minuet-like movements, such as several secular cantatas and the "Et exultavit" solo movement from the *Magnificat in D.* Little and Jenne describe the closing chorus of the *St. John Passion* as a minuet, although Mellers and others interpret it as a sarabande.[41]

Movement 30 ("Ach, nun . . . "), the aria that opens part II of the passion, corresponds to the work's opening chorus in that it depicts a dialogue between the Daughter of Zion and the community of believers. As in the opening chorus, Zion refers to Jesus as "mein Lamm" ["my Lamb"], anxiously wondering if he has been captured in "Tigerklauen" ["tigers' claws"]. The chorus interjects questions of its own, making reference to images from the Song of Solomon ("Wo ist denn dein Freund hingegangen, O du Schönste untern Weibern?") ["Where has thy friend gone, O you fairest among women?"]. In stark contrast to the long, anguished solo line, these passages are characterized by light, dance-like articulation and an attitude of indifferent cheerfulness.[42]

The overall character of this movement, in spite of its inherent contrasts, is that of a minuet. Syncopation, hemiola, slurs across the bar line, and triple meter are evident; Bach makes use of a rhythmic motive similar to that of this aria's opening in the second minuet of his fourth orchestral suite, BWV 1069 (Figures 3a and 3b).

Like many other minuet settings, this dance begins on the downbeat of the measure. The phrases tend to be organized into four-measure units and, like Little and Jenne's description of the minuet prototype, often exhibit a sense of arrival during the fourth measure of such a phrase.[43] The chorus parts are also dance-like in articulation and rhythmic content, while exhibiting a different expression—that of a "secular madrigal," appropriate to the Song of Solomon text.[44]

Superimposed upon the dance-like orchestral accompaniment, the alto soloist sings a complex, highly expressive melody line. The use of dance rhythms in this movement, particularly its choral passages, seems to underscore the lack of depth

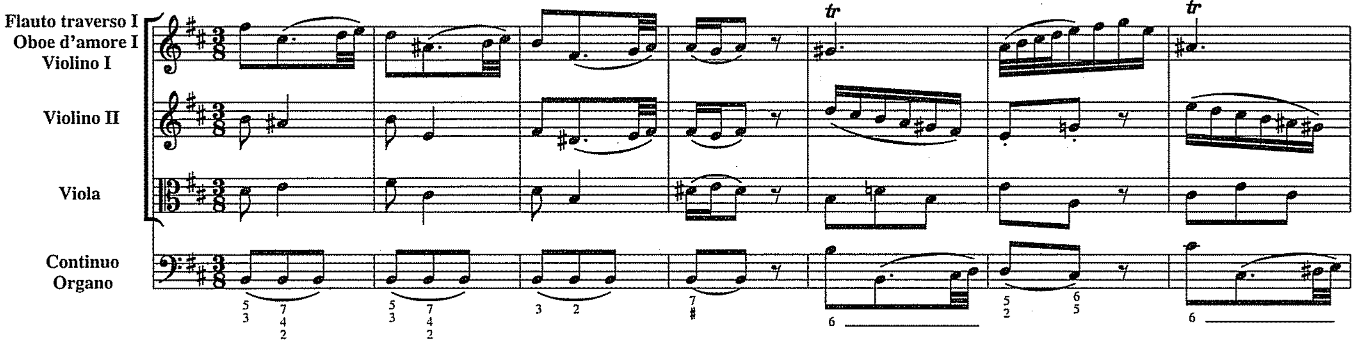

Figure 3a: Movement 30, mm. 1–7.

Figure 3b. Orchestral Suite IV, BWV 1069 Movement 6, mm. 1–4

with which the community of believers responds to Christ's suffering. At the same time, the use of dance idioms may be thought of as reinforcing the concept of the love relationship between the Daughter of Zion and Jesus, and allegorically between the individual soul and Christ. The instrumentation strengthens this interpretation; in the *St. Matthew Passion* and other concerted vocal works of Bach, such as the *Christmas Oratorio,* oboes are frequently associated with love in various forms.[45] Incorporating these instruments and the love poetry of the Song of Solomon at this point in the drama, portrays a very tender personal relationship between the soul and Christ.

5. Movement 68: chorus, "Wir setzen uns mit Tränen nieder" ["We sit down with tears"]—Sarabande

The sarabande is a dance of Spanish ancestry, possibly even with some Arabic connections. In sixteenth-century Mexico and Spain, the zarabanda was a fast, erotic dance in triple meter performed with guitar and castanets. In the seventeenth century the dance was adopted in France and Italy, where it underwent considerable transformations, first into a quick, amorous dance, and later into a slow, noble, and solemn or even melancholy expression. Typically appearing in $\frac{3}{2}$ or $\frac{3}{4}$ meter, the baroque sarabande is characterized by a heavily accented second beat, often a dotted-note value, and by balanced four- or eight-measure phrases. Mattheson describes the character of the sarabande as one of ambition, and one that permits no running notes because of its bombastic nature.[46] Joachim Quantz specifies that the sarabande has "the same pace as the courante, but it is rendered in a somewhat more pleasing manner."[47] Rhythmic figures characteristic of the sarabande include mixtures of even and dotted figures (Figure 4).

Bach wrote more sarabandes than any other dance type and composed for instrumental and vocal forces, including titled sarabandes in all six French suites and his keyboard partitas. The theme or aria of the Goldberg Variations (BWV 988) is a sarabande. Two of Bach's orchestral suites—BWV 1069 in D major and BWV 1067 in B minor—contain sarabandes, as do solo or choral movements from as many as ten cantatas.

Like the opening chorus of the *Passion,* the closing movement ("Wir setzen uns . . .") calls for full orchestra (I and II) and full chorus (I and II). Unlike the *Passion's* opening chorus, however, much of the closing movement is set for tutti choruses, especially the outer sections of the overall ABA form, although some antiphonal treatment is used to set off a dialogue effect in both chorus and orchestra. Albert Schweitzer, who aptly speaks of the epic tranquillity of the *St. Matthew* choruses, describes the work's closing movement as "a piece of burial music."[49] Its solemnity, steady rhythmic activity, and triple meter have caused at least three authors to describe the movement as a sarabande; C. S. Terry and others, in fact, associate the melody with an instrumental sarabande dating from Bach's Cöthen period (Figure 5).[50]

Another attribute of this movement that confirms its resemblance to the sarabande is its serious or melancholy tone; Louis Horst describes the typical eighteenth-century sarabande as exhibiting "religious and processional austerity."[52] Sarabandes frequently feature hemiola in the middle measures of the phrase and some syncopation, as well as highly balanced construction. The idea of balance, of phrase length and overall form, is important to all dance music, but to the sarabande in particular. Little and Jenne

Figure 4. Rhythmic patterns of the sarabande[48]

Figure 5. Sarabande from Suite in C minor, no. III of Verschiedene Instrumental-Kompositionen [51]

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describe the prototype as follows:

> The sarabande dance rhythm. . . consists of a harmonic-rhythmic phrase of 12 beats (four measures). The thesis, or release from tension, occurs on beat 10 (beginning of measure 4) and diminishes further (becomes more thetic) going into beat 12. A preliminary thesis is often heard in measure 2 (beats 4, 5, and 6), beginning on beat 4 and continuing into beat 6, but is often "spoiled" by harmonies and rhythms which keep the movement going forward.[53]

This pattern can be observed clearly in the opening phrase of the final chorus, both in the orchestral introduction (measures 1–4) and its choral counterpart (measures 13–16) (Figure 6).

The form of "Wir setzen uns" is an overall ABA structure. During the movement's middle section, Bach introduces new melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic material in conjunction with new text: "Ruht, ihr ausgesognen Glieder." The melodic material of this movement is characterized by predominantly conjunct motion and an overall sense of downward melodic contour. This sense of downward direction befits the expressive character of a piece mourning the death of Christ; it is as if, in Terry's words, "the Saviour's body sinks into the grave on descending phrases."[54] The melodic motive found in mm. 17–18 (soprano voice) features a strong emphasis on the second beat of the measure and is usually followed by a syncopated measure, in character with the sarabande. Descending pairs of slurred eighth notes in conjunct motion, typically baroque melodic symbols for sorrow or sighing, are also evident in much of this chorus.

Colorful use of dissonance in conjunction with clear formal structures is not unusual in sarabandes, particularly those by Bach, and this movement is no exception. Probably the most striking use of dissonance is the highly audible upward-resolving appoggiatura on the downbeat of mm. 36, 48, 116, and 128. The B♮ rising to C is played by the flutes of both orchestras and stands out even more because it is approached disjunctly from the D below—from a rather low flute tessitura to a much brighter one. This "delicately calculated final rising appoggiatura . . . draws attention to itself as something which is disturbing or original,"[55] especially appearing as it does in the final chord of the entire work.

An important recurring rhythmic motive in the piece is the steady, repeated quarter-note figure in the bass instruments, reinforcing the dance-like quality of the movement.

Another rhythmic technique that Bach uses effectively in this movement, and another characteristic of the sarabande, is the displacement or obscuring of expected or normal metric stress. The piece's B section, for example, begins with a hemiola-like treatment, particularly in the upper two voice parts. This rhythm of mm. 49 and 50, in fact, exactly matches one of Little and Jenne's examples of typical rhythmic patterns in the sarabande, but with an extended hemiola effect (Figure 7).

The breadth and musical magnitude of this choral sarabande provide a fitting final reflection on the events of the passion story, and about its significance for believers of Bach's time and for all time. The sarabande in the music of Bach, by Mellers's description, is both human and divine; its appearance at the close of the Passion may signify that "Christ as paraclete and heavenly musician leads us dancing to heaven, his relation to the soul being that of bridegroom to bride."[56] By setting the piece as a dance, Bach also underscores the message of the biblical story with his own symbolic statement of

Figure 6. Movement 68, mm 13–16

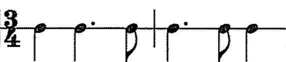

Figure 7a. Typical rhythmic pattern of the sarabande

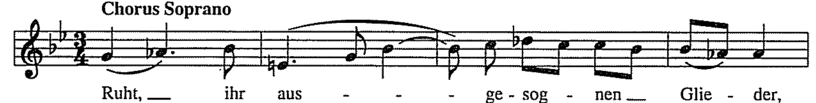

Figure7b. Movement 68, mm. 49–52

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faith: for Christ, and therefore for all of humanity, the tomb is not the end of the story. The resurrection is a certainty. The mourning at the grave on Good Friday will give way to dancing on Easter morning. Within a tightly organized overall formal conception and by means of a specific and deliberately chosen dance idiom, Bach has carefully crafted a work that provides an eloquent and poignant conclusion for a monumental sacred composition.

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Why did Bach choose to link such an abundance of dance rhythms with the mournful narrative of the *St. Matthew Passion?* A decision regarding which of these dance motives were used with intentional theological symbolism and which were used only for musical or formal means, must remain a matter of conjecture; from Bach's perspective, however, an integration of the secular rhythms of dance with the sacred passion story makes good Lutheran sense. For Bach, death and sin will never have the last word; that role is reserved for the word become flesh, Jesus Christ, whose dance of victory lasts beyond crucifixion and death into eternity. This message, that of the eternal triumph of the victorious Christ, is at the core of the *St. Matthew Passion.* As in the words of the psalmist, "mourning is turned into dancing"[57] for Bach and for all humankind because of God's loving and redemptive act. The dance of God set to music, the celebration of ultimate victory that subtly permeates the *St. Matthew Passion,* is Bach's response to this

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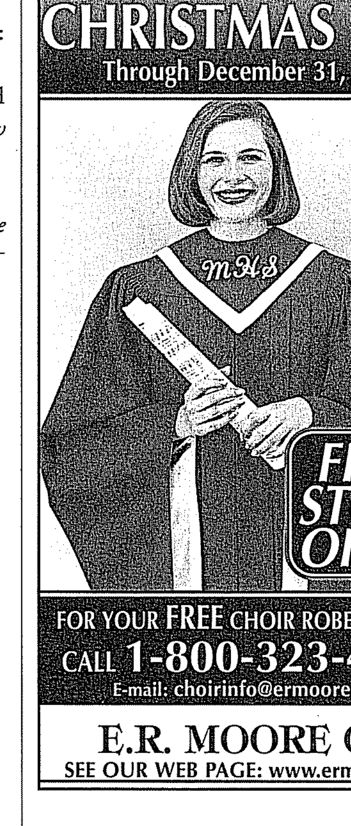

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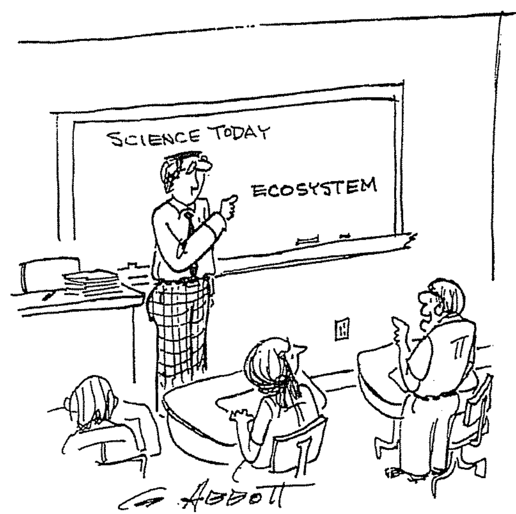

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